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The families being honored here today have been judged according to criteria that not only measure the strength of a farm family, but also the strength of American agriculture as a whole.

These families have shown themselves to be efficient users of land, labor, and capital resources. They have demonstrated the ability to sustain high rates of production of livestock and crops. They have put sound management techniques into practice--techniques which result in higher income, reduced energy consumption, and other benefits.

Meeting those criteria has helped make these farm families successful, and has earned them our recognition and admiration.

Meeting those criteria also has made American agriculture successful. This year, efficient use of resources, high rates of production, and sound management practices have reaped for us the most bountiful harvest in our history. They also have made another year of record agricultural exports possible. These exports put a big dent in our overall trade deficit, help to curb inflation, and keep a million people off the farm employed.

Arkansas has been an important contributor to American agriculture's success. Farm families like those here today have made this state our country's top poultry and rice producer and exporter, and one of our strongest producers and exporters of soybeans and cotton.

Remarks prepared for delivery by Deputy Secretary Jim Williams, before the Arkansas Farm Family of the Year Luncheon, Little Rock, Arkansas, December 7, 1979

But with all of this success, the family farm, as we have known it, has begun to change. Studies indicate that in recent decades the number of farms in this country is declining, and that those farms remaining are larger than before. The average age of farm operators has increased as fewer young farmers replace those who retire. Many of those young adults who do take up farming do so only on a part-time basis. Most of their income comes from other sources.

Of the 2 million farms counted by the agricultural census, 200,000 now produce nearly two-thirds of the nation's food and fiber. While many of these farms are still family-owned, a lot of small-scale family farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to stay in business.

That is one of the reasons Secretary Bergland is now holding public hearings on the structure of American agriculture. We want to examine whether or not this trend is in the best interests of American agriculture, and the country as a whole. These hearings will provide an opportunity for the public to help determine what kind of agriculture is best for this country's future, and what kinds of policies should or should not be developed.

Of course, agriculture is not the only industry changing. Our entire society has been in a state of change. The large-scale movement of women into the work force and the increased mobility of Americans are among the factors that many people feel have put undue stress on all of our families, both rural and urban.

The White House Conference on Families, which is chaired by Arkansan Jim Guy Tucker, is being held to examine both the problems and strengths of American families. As is the case with the structure project, public hearings are now being held nationwide. These hearings will help determine what issues will be taken up at the actual conferences, which will be held in several locations throughout the country next summer.

These hearings will provide an additional opportunity for farm families to bring public attention to their concerns. In hearings already held, farm families have brought up economic issues such as those being addressed at the structure hearings, and social issues related to the preservation and development of rural communities.

I know that some people are uncomfortable with the amount of attention that the federal government is now paying to the American family. They feel that the future of the family is not an area in which government should be involved.

I am not one of those people. I think the federal government's interest in the family is long overdue. It's important to recognize that despite the rapid changes which characterize our times, some fundamental institutions and values--and there are none more fundamental than the American family--are still needed.

That is why the families here deserve our admiration. They are a testimonial to the ability of Americans to maintain and improve their performance, adjust to change, and still preserve traditional values. Families like these are what make American agriculture great. They are what make America great.

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